

Story 1930 (1995 Tape 1)

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Two Lambs Rescued from a Wolf

Once there was and once there was not,¹ time within time,²
when the sieve was in the straw,³ when the flea was a barber and the

¹Formulaic opening for many Turkish folktales, this is known as a tekerleme. A full tekerleme may run to several lines, though most narrators nowadays use only one or two parts of a tekerleme. The tekerleme is a nonsense jingle filled with paradoxes and other comic incongruities. It is meant both to amuse and to alert the audience to the fact that a tale is to follow. Some of the humor is lost in translation because it is difficult to reproduce in English the rhyme scheme.

²"Time within Time" refers to the chronology of events in an interior world. A person may dream or fantasize at great length during only a few seconds of ordinary time. One may even seem to spend many years in that other world within; one may take a job, marry, have children, and see them grow to maturity. In Turkish this is called Zaman Zaman İçinde. It is elsewhere sometimes referred to as "Frozen Time" or "Moments of Eternity."

³The humor here derives from the fact that the sieve is never in the straw; the straw is in the sieve. It refers to the threshing of grain on farms too small or too remote to have available modern threshing machines. On a dried-clay threshing floor, stalks of grain are thrown. They are chopped up into small pieces by a döven, a wooden rectangle from the bottom of which protrude scores of sharp pieces of flint. When the chopped-up mass is winnowed, the chaff blows downwind, but there fall directly to the floor kernels of grain and small bits of the stem to which grain is still attached. Both the kernels and the small pieces of straw to which some kernels are still attached are then thrown into a sieve (about 30 inches in diameter). The kernels fall through

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camel was a town crier, when I was rocking my mother's cradle and sending my father off to school every day—well, back in those days there was a mother sheep who had two lambs. Every day when the mother sheep went out to seek food for herself and for her babies, she used to have the lambs lock the door from within. When she returned home later in the day, she would knock on the door and say, "My mouth is full of grass and my breasts are full of milk. Open the door, my babies, for I am home." After the mother sheep had been admitted into the house, she fed her lambs with grass and milk.

In the nearby forest there lived a wolf. Every day for some time, that wolf had watched the mother sheep's departure from her house and her later return. He had also listened carefully to what the sheep had said to her lambs upon her return. One day after the mother sheep had been gone from home for awhile, the wolf went to the door of her house and knocked. It seemed too early for their mother's return, and so the lambs asked, "Who is it?"

The wolf answered in a deep voice, "My mouth is full of grass and my breasts are full of milk. Open the door, my babies. I am home again."

onto a sheet of canvas, but the grain-laden straw remains in the sieve. The final threshing of these bits of straw is done by the fingers of the threshers.

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But the lambs said, "You have a deep voice that is not like our mother's, and so we are not going to open the door for you."

A little later the mother sheep came home, knocked on the door, and said, "My mouth is full of grass and my breasts are full of milk. Open the door, my babies. I am home." After the lambs had opened the door, their mother fed them, as usual, with grass and milk.

While this was going on, the wolf crept quietly up to the door and listened to the conversation going on inside the house. He listened carefully to the tone of the mother's voice so that he could later imitate it.

The following day the mother again left home to search for food. The wolf waited for awhile after her departure and then went to the door of the house. After knocking on the door, he said very softly in the tone of the mother's voice "My mouth is full of grass and my breasts are full of milk. Open the door, my babies. I am home."

The lambs fell into this trap and opened the door. Of course the wolf entered the house and devoured the two lambs. The two lambs filled his stomach so completely that he became drowsy, and before long, he fell fast asleep.

When the mother sheep returned, she was surprised to find the front door open. Entering the house, she found the wolf with swollen stomach sleeping on the floor, but she could not find her two lambs

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anywhere. She went quietly into the kitchen and got a large knife. Then she cut open the wolf's stomach and removed her babies from it. The first thing she said to them was this: "Never speak to or open the door to strangers." After that, the sheep family lived happily and safely.

Three apples fell from heaven. One of them was for me, and the others were for the two lambs.⁴

⁴This is one of the more popular terminal devices for Turkish folktales. There are various options for the distribution of the apples. A coy storyteller may say, "One of the apples is for me, one for the listener, and one for the narrator of this tale."